

NOTES ON BOOKS

KIDNAPPED—SHAKESPEARIANA—FRANKLIN IN CHINESE—BOOKSELLING.

FROM THE REGULAR CORRESPONDENT OF THE "READER."

LO, now, July 23.

Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson's "Kidnapped" is, if you like, only a boy's story, like "Treasure Island," but it is a book of genius or som' thing very near it. Lucky are the boys for whom such a book is written, no matter of what age. I believe I have said that the lot of boys who are readers and admirers of "Treasure Island" includes Cabinet Ministers, and even the Prime Minister. The present tale made its first appearance in a cheap weekly paper for boys; a notable advance the tastes of boys too long nourished on penny dreadfuls must have made. This is the invasion of literature into a province heretofore the prey of barbers.

It is the fashion now to praise Mr. Stevenson, who was long neglected save by the few, and it may be difficult to please him too much. One writer styles him the Dafos of our generation, and is of opinion that since Robinson Crusoe no book of adventure has appeared that can pretend to rivalry with "Treasure Island." To heighten his praise of Mr. Stevenson, he disposes Fannion Cooper, which seems unnecessary and unoriginal. Of a certain book of adventure called "Two Years Before the Mast" this panegyrist of Mr. Stevenson seems never to have heard. It has the disadvantage of being true, but it is none the less a book of adventure, and it happens to be the book which Mr. Gladstone singled out as the sole successor to Robinson Crusoe. City Mr. Dana could not have had in view that Mr. Stevenson has read deeply in the P. W. period. Swift is certainly familiar to him, and he has studied Swift's method of giving verisimilitude to improbabilities. "Kidnapped" has for front-piece a map or sketch of the cruise of the Brig "Covenant" and the probable course of David Balfour's wanderings. The book itself is described as "Memoirs of the Adventures of David Balfour in the year 1751; how he was Kidnapped and Cast away; his Sufferings in a Deser't Isle; his Journey in the Wild Highlands; his acquaintance with Alan Breck Stewart and other notorious Highland Jacobites; with all that he suffered at the hands of his Uncle, Ebenezer Balfour of Shaws, falsely so called; written by himself and now set forth by Robert Louis Stevenson."

To see how much this is in Swift's manner we have only to turn to the book commonly called Guilliver's Travels. That also, it may be worth remarking, is a book of adventure, and was published after Robinson Crusoe, and may probably "pretend to rivalry" with anything Mr. Stevenson has yet done. It is not wholly unknown to the critic who pronounces, as is the fashion of critics, so sweeping a judgment. The true title of the book is "Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships." Swift's preface is in the form of an address from the publisher to the reader—the publisher meaning the editor. Although Mr. Guilliver, he tells us, "was born in Nottinghamshire, where his father dwelt, yet I have heard him say his family came from Oxfordshire; to confirm which I have observed in the churchyard at Bambury in that country several tombs and monuments of the Guillivers." Mr. Stevenson's "Ebenezer Balfour of Shaws, falsely so called" is out of the same mould. There is no question of borrowing; all I mean is that Mr. Stevenson works by some of the same processes as Swift; which is patognomonic, not censure.

The Birmingham Free Library seems to be engaged in a praiseworthy effort to complete its collection of all known or perhaps all important editions of Shakespeare since the beginning of the eighteenth century. A list of its desiderata is given in one of the trade organs. Among the editions advertised for are several printed in Boston, Philadelphia, and even Auburn. Birmingham has a reputation for doing with energy whatever it does, and its Free Libraries are among the best monuments of its intelligence and public spirit. Only hope that it pays more heed than it once did to condition as an element of value in books.

In the same trade organ I find a remark which the American collector of Shakespeare will do well to heed. A set of the first four folio editions of Shakespeare is to be sold next week at Sotheby's.

"What a number of copies of the first folio have turned up during the last two or three years," cries the trade organist; "there seems to be no end to them. If the book had been as rare as was popularly supposed, there have been enough copies sent to the States [this means the United States of America] alone to exhaust the English market. The fact is, the book is comparatively common, except in fine condition, when indeed it is a rarity."

But how few people know whether a copy is fine or not. Not long ago I went over a celebrated college library in company with a large party which included some distinguished persons. Everything was shown us, and at last we were taken into a room where the chief treasures of the library were kept by themselves under lock and key. The key was applied to the lock and the treasures were produced. Some of them were treasures in every sense of the word, and deserved all the care and homage bestowed on them. But one of the books shown with pride was a copy of the First Folio of Shakespeare; short, unbound, with torn leaves, and laid aside with little respect and veneration either in fac-simile or mere scraps and fragments of the original, pasted together on a modern leaf. The book was all but worthless, but to tell the excellent librarian so would have been sheer cruelty, and I am glad to say our party surveyed this precious volume with grave faces and said what they were expected to say.

A literary curiosity of no little interest has come into my hands, nothing less than Poor Richard's Almanac in Chinese. What would Franklin have said? The late Mr. W. H. Huntington had a collection of European editions of Poor Richard in different languages. I believe there were about thirty in all, and he did not think his collection complete. So long as his health lasted, he never ceased his efforts to enlarge the number. While Mr. John Russell Young was American Minister at Pekin he seized the opportunity of having a translation done into Chinese. It was executed under the care of the president of the Pekin College, Dr. T. H. Avery, and soon after its completion, the Chinese edition was issued in New York, Boston, and other American cities. Address, Mrs. C. H. STODDARD, 100 Nassau Street, New York.

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